

Just over a year ago, representatives from 189 countries met in Beijing at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. That historic gathering focused the attention of the world on women's rights and needs. Now, we are beginning to see some progress. In many countries, increasing numbers of women are contesting and attaining public office and playing a vital role in shaping the political agenda. In Romania, women gathered from around Central and Eastern Europe to promote the goals of the Beijing women's conference. Thailand has passed a new anti-prostitution law. Women in Namibia are now afforded equal rights with men in marriage. Chile has made a serious commitment to expanding educational opportunities for girls. And in the United States, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, that I signed into law in September of 1994, reflects our profound national commitment to ending abuse against women. These are just a few hopeful signs of improvement in global respect for women's rights, and it is fitting that we celebrate them.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim December 10, 1996, as Human Rights Day; December 15, 1996, as Bill of Rights Day; and the week beginning December 10, 1996, as Human Rights Week. I call upon the people of the United States to celebrate these observances with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities that demonstrate our national commitment to the Constitution and the promotion of human rights for all people.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this tenth day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-first.

William J. Clinton

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Remarks on the Appointment of Evelyn Lieberman as Director of the Voice of America and an Exchange With Reporters

December 10, 1996

The President. Fifty-four years ago, just a few months after the United States entered World War II, the Voice of America went on the air with these words: "The news may be good. The news may be bad. We shall tell you the truth." VOA lit Europe's darkest night with a bright spotlight of truth and then became a key weapon in the war of ideas we waged and won against communism.

Today, VOA beams America's voices to nearly 100 million listeners in every corner of our planet every week. The news it delivers—reliable, authoritative, objective—is more important than ever. There are millions and millions and millions of people around the world who are hungry, indeed starved, for accurate information still and for the insights it gives them on how they can organize themselves to change their own lives for the better.

Under Geoff Cowan's extraordinary leadership, the VOA has developed innovative new shows that examine how institutions of democracy and free markets work. It has moved from what Director Cowan calls monolog to dialog, with call-in programs in a dozen languages. We were just talking before we came in about a call-in program that the First Lady did where she got calls from all over the world, including some surprising places. The VOA has increased coverage of human rights issues. It has used the best available technology, like satellites, to deliver better programming to more people.

I thank Geoff, who has been my friend for many years now, for so ably carrying on a family tradition. His father, Louis Cowan, was the VOA's second director. And most of all, I thank him for his service to our Nation and to the community of nations.

All around the world new democracies we have worked so hard to support are taking root. But they remain fragile, and we must nurture and defend them. The free flow of information is the lifeblood of democracy. And it is very important that the mission of the VOA continue.

I can think of no greater life force for the free flow of ideas and for VOA's future than its new director, whom I have the honor of naming today, Evelyn Lieberman. Her strong, unique voice has reverberated throughout the White House from my first day in office—[laughter]—I see from your laughter that you know I have not overstated that; “reverberated” is the operative word—first as Assistant to the First Lady's Chief of Staff, then as Deputy Press Secretary, most recently as Deputy Chief of Staff, the first woman ever to hold that job.

Evelyn has a special talent for cutting to the chase and getting to the truth, as just about every member of the press corps and the White House staff, including the President, know from first-hand experience. As Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, she did make the trains run on time. But more than that, she made them run straight and true because of her steely determination, her extraordinary integrity, and her great, good heart. We will miss her skill, her passionate personality, which could warm even the coldest room here at the White House.

Now Evelyn will bring her talent and her energy to the VOA and return, as she told me she wanted to do, to her career-long love, communications. Before her White House years, Evelyn was press secretary to Senator Joe Biden, director of public affairs for the Children's Defense Fund, communications director for the National Urban Coalition. Her extraordinary breadth of experience will help VOA continue the remarkable work Geoff Cowan has done to meet the challenge of change.

As Secretary of State-designate Albright said of Secretary Christopher, Evelyn Lieberman will be hard pressed to fill Geoff Cowan's shoes with her heels. But she does have the experience, the leadership skills, and the drive to do the job, to do it very well, and to carry on VOA's unique mission of spreading truth and hope around the world. I am very pleased that she has accepted this appointment and ask her now to say a few words.

[At this point, Evelyn Lieberman made brief remarks.]

California's Proposition 209

Q. Mr. President, are you going to do anything about Prop 209? [Laughter]

The President. I thought you were going to—

Ms. Lieberman. My role model. [Laughter]

The President. I thought you were going into the radio talk show business.

Q. Not quite.

The President. Well, let me say I have not yet received the final recommendations from the Justice Department and the Counsel's Office. They're working back and forth on that. As all of you know, I opposed publicly and strongly 209. I thought it was bad policy for the people of California and a bad example for America. Whether it is unconstitutional is a different question, and our people are working very hard there to work through the legal and constitutional issues to give me a recommendation about what we should do and how we should do it.

And I am eager to get their recommendation. They're just working very hard on it and looking at all the aspects of the argument. I expect to have a recommendation soon and then to make a very speedy decision after that.

Second Term Transition

Q. Mr. President, now that you've filled the VOA job so happily, can you tell us anything about your decision on the Attorney General's job?

The President. No. I'm making these appointments, you know, in an orderly fashion and making these announcements. I haven't even been able to meet with all the members of my administration yet, and we're doing it in a regular fashion. We will do it and announce them as we're ready.

Q. Have you met and talked with Janet Reno about this yet?

The President. Not about this appointment, but we'll meet soon. I expect by—oh, in the next several days I expect to have met with all the rest of the members of the Cabinet and the senior administration officials with whom I have not yet met. There are still a few, and we're working through that as we work through more announcements as well.

Serbia

Q. Mr. President, metaphorically speaking, you are the voice of America. [Laughter] I can't help but make the link now——

The President. Except for a few days ago. [Laughter]

Q. I can't help but make the link to Eastern Europe and the Serbia situation. What would you say to Mr. Milosevic?

The President. That elections should be respected and that the voice of the people should be heard, and that the human, political, and civil rights of the people should be respected. The United States has made its statement and its position clear. Neither we nor anyone else would seek to interfere in the internal events in Serbia, but our sympathies are always with free people who are struggling to express their freedom and want to have the integrity of their elections respected.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:54 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia.

Statement Announcing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Summit December 10, 1996

Today, America and its NATO allies agreed to hold a NATO summit on July 8–9, 1997, in Madrid to take the crucial next steps on the enlargement and adaptation of the North Atlantic alliance for the 21st century. This marks an important milestone on the road to an integrated, democratic, and secure Europe.

The summit will seek to advance a strong and enduring NATO-Russia partnership; to strengthen partnership with all of Europe's new democracies; to approve adaptations within NATO to prepare the alliance to meet the challenges of the coming century; and to invite the first aspiring NATO members to begin accession talks to join the alliance. My goal is to see NATO take in its first new members by 1999, the 50th anniversary of NATO's founding and the 10th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

From the beginning of my administration, I have worked hard to end the cold war division of Europe and to create, for the first time in history, a Europe united in democracy, security, and free market prosperity. Now, we must continue to reach out to Russia, and include this great nation in the fabric of Europe's emerging community of democracies. We must open the doors of Europe's institutions that nurtured peace, prosperity, and security throughout the cold war to Europe's new democracies, excluding no nation that shares our values and is willing and able to shoulder our common responsibilities.

NATO has never threatened any other nation, nor will an enlarged NATO do so in the future. While NATO's new members will be full members of the alliance, NATO has no intention, no plan, and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members.

We have made tremendous progress over the last 4 years in realizing our vision of an undivided Europe at peace, and no one deserves more credit than Warren Christopher. Thanks to his efforts, Secretary-designate Madeleine Albright and my new national security team will have a strong foundation on which to achieve that important goal.

Remarks at a Democratic Leadership Council Luncheon

December 11, 1996

Thank you. The last person clapping is my first new Ambassador in the new term. [Laughter]

Thank you, Bernard Schwartz, for that wonderful introduction and for your life of private and public achievement. I was hearing you say all those terrific things, and I thought to myself, I'm glad you did what you did, but I'd like you even better if you owned a newspaper. [Laughter]

I want to thank my longtime friend Senator Lieberman and Governor Romer for their work for the DLC. And I see my predecessors as chairs out there: Senator Chuck Robb and Congressman Dave McCurdy. I thank them for the work they did at the DLC.